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0873: The Fake News and Information Literacy Project

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Fall 10-27-2021

### West Virginia Participant 2 (White/female/46) interviewed on October 27, 2021

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# **Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

## **The Fake News and Information Literacy Project**

Stephen M. Underhill, PhD, Principal Investigator



Marshall University IRB

Approved on:	9/17/21
Expires on:	9/15/21
Study number:	1779793

### **Key Information**

You are invited to participate in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand. The following is a short summary to help you decide why you may or may not want to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form.

The purpose of this study is to understand the Appalachian experience with fake news and how people determine what is/not credible online. We expect that you will be in this research study for one hour. Though you will be anonymous and your identity will be kept secret, a redacted copy of your interview transcript will be posted online on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website ([https://mds.marshall.edu/oral\\_history/](https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/)).

You will be asked 64 questions. Your dialogue will be recorded on Microsoft Teams and housed on Marshall University's OneDrive, which is password protected. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester (during finals week). To protect your privacy, you will be identified by your state of residence, race, sex, age and participant number. For example, the Digital Scholar website will catalogue your interview with a pseudonym like "Kentucky Participant 5 (White/Male/65), interviewed on October 5, 2021." Please avoid mentioning your name or other identifying information in the interview. Your name will not be on the transcript. The name of the interviewer will not be included in the transcript or otherwise on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website. All identifying information will be removed before transcripts are posted online. But once transcripts are posted on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website, they will be permanent. We will not be able to remove them.

### **How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?**

About 24 people every semester people will take part in this study. A total of 24 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study per semester.

### **What Is Involved In This Research Study?**

You will be asked a series of 64 open-ended questions about your thoughts and feelings on fake news and disinformation online. You will be asked about your opinion of sensitive social questions like issues of race, class, religion, etc.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded. You will only be identified as "you" during the interview. The Microsoft Teams recording, which will be with the camera turned off, will be stored on Marshall University's OneDrive and will only be shared with the FYS small group, the FYS graduate assistant and the professor. These people will use the recoding to verify consent and make a

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

redacted transcript. Definitized transcripts will be uploaded to Marshall University's Digital Scholar website ([https://mds.marshall.edu/oral\\_history/](https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/)).

### *What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?*

You may choose to not take part in the study. You may leave the study up to the point that the interview is complete. Once the redacted transcript is posted on the website a participant may not withdraw. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

The study investigator may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

### *Detailed Risks Of The Study*

Because the recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester, and because the only a deidentified redacted transcript will be posted online, there is no foreseeable risk in the study.

### *What About Confidentiality?*

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

### *What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?*

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

### *Will You Be Paid For Participating?*

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

### *Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?*

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Stephen Underhill at 304-696-3020 or at [underhills@marshall.edu](mailto:underhills@marshall.edu). You should also contact the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

Did you receive a copy of the consent form?

Please say Yes or No

Do you agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older?

Please say Yes or No

Have you had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered?

Please say Yes or No

What is today's date?

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about when you first started using social media and news started appearing for the first time on your feed like Facebook or Twitter.

**Participant:** I started using Facebook around 2008 and I really don't recall seeing news appearing until maybe before the 2016 election.

**Interviewer:** On a normal day, how do you use the Internet?

**Participant:** I use the Internet on my cell phone and on my laptop.

**Interviewer:** What types of websites do you visit?

**Participant:** I visit Google and a lot of other websites for school. I'm a college student, so I use the school's website a lot. That's about it.

**Interviewer:** What did you search for online in the last week?

**Participant:** I searched for research assignments for school.

**Interviewer:** What websites do you visit to pass time when you are bored?

**Participant:** I usually use Instagram and the *New York Times*.

**Interviewer:** What do you do on those sites?

**Participant:** I'm just browsing usually, just looking up articles that I'm interested in.

**Interviewer:** OK, and why do you visit those particular sites?

**Participant:** *New York Times*, I visit mainly because I think it's a credible news source and Instagram is more for entertainment.

**Interviewer:** Thinking about these questions, what do you think other people are doing, people you know and people you don't know? How do other people pass time online?

**Participant:** Well, there are a lot of people posting on Instagram, so I would assume that's what people are doing, posting things on Instagram and TikTok and scrolling through them. But I would say that they're just on social media. That's how they pass time.

**Interviewer:** What types of devices do you use to access the Internet: phones, tablets, laptops? Which do you use most or the least?

**Participant:** I use my laptop and my phone. When I'm in school, I probably use my laptop more. In breaks from school, I probably use my phone more.

**Interviewer:** What social media or forums like Twitter or Reddit do you use? When, why or for what do you use them? Please share any that you try to avoid and your reasons for avoiding them.

**Participant:** I really only use Instagram. Occasionally TikTok because someone will send me something from TikTok and it opens TikTok for that. I avoid Facebook. I still have an account, but I don't have it on my phone. I avoid it. For negativity and aggravation and for the misinformation that's on Facebook.

**Interviewer:** When thinking about people you likely disagree with, please describe which forums you think they likely use and why.

**Participant:** I would say that they probably use Facebook and Twitter. Maybe mostly Facebook now, but I mean because they could get it, they can get away with posting whatever they want.

**Interviewer:** Describe for me what you do when you want to find out something factual. How do people around you find out something factual?

**Participant:** If I want to find something factual, I usually go to my trusted news sources mainly for facts, I use my online library through school. I think people around me sometimes use things like Twitter and Facebook to look up facts and people that they trust on those forums to get what they think is factual.

**Interviewer:** Everyone comes across things that surprise them on social media between advertising, news, and commentary. Please describe a time when you came across content that you doubted was trustworthy or made you distrust its author or its purpose.

**Participant:** I remember seeing a picture going around online of President Trump in a suit, on a canoe or kayak or something with the description of how he was out there helping save people from a flood or hurricane or something. I doubt it was true. Mainly he was in a suit in a boat, it just didn't even look real. The purpose of that was to show you that Trump is out there helping people which didn't really go along with what I felt about Trump. I distrusted the author. It was just someone who was a Trump supporter, so I distrusted the information.

**Interviewer:** Describe a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content.

**Participant:** It is very typical for me, if I see something on social media to want to talk about it. I mean, it's typical for me to call up my mom and talk to her about it and ask her if it's true. She's a reliable source in my opinion.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about a time you saw such content discussed on the news.

**Participant:** I don't really watch regular news on TV. It's mostly through... most of the news that I read is on apps like the *New York Times* app or like NPR's website. I will see some fact-checking on those sites to tell you where this came from. I think in the case of the Donald Trump in a suit in a boat, I think that picture was taken out of context, it wasn't a current photo. It was from something else if I recall.

**Interviewer:** If there are social media sites that you think are untrustworthy, what makes them untrustworthy?

**Participant:** I'll find them untrustworthy because one of my trusted sites has proven them to not be giving factual information.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about your experiences finding conspiracy theories.

**Participant:** I usually don't hear about conspiracy theories. Yeah, I'll investigate them based on news articles discussing conspiracy theories, but I wouldn't say that I follow them. I don't follow a lot of people on social media who are conspiracy theorists, so it's mostly news that's already pointed out that these are conspiracy theories, and I might investigate it a little further.

**Interviewer:** If applicable please describe a time when you shared content that you thought was true, but later learned it was not true.

**Participant:** I honestly, I'm so careful with anything I post, and I post so little that I don't think that that has happened. I mostly post about my family, which is all true information.

**Interviewer:** If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true.

**Participant:** That's not applicable to me.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about a time when a search engine like Google or Yahoo seemed to give you what it thought you were looking for based on what you already searched for, when you noticed that search result seemed somehow tailored to you? If anywhere, where on the news have you seen this discussed?

**Participant:** Most recently I was trying to find a recipe using portobello mushrooms and when I typed in "PORT" it popped up Portland leather goods where I had just bought a purse from. I obviously had searched for Portland leather goods before, so that's where it thought I was going. I have noticed because I look up a lot of vegan recipes that's what seems to come up first, if I type in a chili recipe, vegan chili recipes will come up before your chili recipes that have meat in them.

**Interviewer:** OK, how do you decide what personal information you will provide to social media companies like YouTube or Google?

**Participant:** I really don't provide them with anything other than what I must in order to have access to something, like my age, my email is oftentimes required. But I don't give them anymore other than what I must.

**Interviewer:** Tell me the ways you try to protect your personal information online.

**Participant:** I keep my social media private. I also like to keep my location services off unless I have to have them on.

**Interviewer:** What do you think others around you are doing?

**Participant:** I would say they're probably doing similar things, maybe more with the security settings on different apps and trying to keep up. Yeah, it's hard to keep updated with that as the security settings on everything get switched around often.

**Interviewer:** What have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news or heard your friends or family discuss?

**Participant:** Basically, what I've just described. I have seen some steps and videos posted on news sites with step-by-step instructions for how to set your Instagram account to private, and with security settings. As far as friends and family go, I think we all just kind of keep each other in the loop for the same thing. If we know there's a new setting, we need to go in and update this to keep our stuff private.

**Interviewer:** How have you responded to how Internet companies trying to customize or control what you see when on their platforms like Google searches? What have you heard others discuss about this?



**Participant:** I've heard a lot of people talk about it being dumb and an invasion of privacy. I've kind of heard a couple of sides to this. They're trying to make your experience more personal. Honestly, I kind of find it amusing and sometimes will purposely search for something to see if I get an ad for it on Instagram. I'm not really doing anything or searching for anything that I don't want people to know.

**Interviewer:** If you were to explain to your friends or family how false information spreads and can be found on the Internet or how to avoid false information, what would you say?

**Participant:** I would say never to repost or share anything without fact checking. I just question everything. It's annoying, but if you want to see less false information, stop. Once you find something to not be true or know someone who is posting misinformation just quit following them if you want to weed out the false information to get rid of the sources of it.

**Interviewer:** What do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits? Who do you think made this system? What do you think controls information online or in our apps?

**Participant:** I don't think I really understand the ins-and-outs of it, but I guess what we see online is determined by who we're friends with on social media or who we follow on social media. How things spread? I think the more likes or more views something gets, I think probably the advertisers, people who are trying to sell us things, are the ones who benefit the most. I really don't know who controls the information online in our apps. I don't really know who has the ultimate control over that.

**Interviewer:** The internet is full of stories that divide people about things like the Coronavirus, the Capitol Riot, Stop the Steal, Antifa, Black Lives Matter, climate change, QAnon, and the political parties. If you were to decide, how would you like schools or the news to talk about what controls the internet and what is seen?

**Participant:** I think that schools and the news should push the stuff that's out of context. Be more factual. Again, actual footage, but not taken out of context and not just one side of things.

**Interviewer:** If you happened to see stories about Stop the Steal and the Capitol Riot, what do you make of why the protesters were there? Why do you think some dressed in costumes like hunters and trappers, or with animal pelts, or with Norse tattoos, or as Roman soldiers, or in groups like Cowboys for Trump? What does this mean for stories

about voter fraud and voting rights? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

**Participant:** I think I thought the protesters were there to voice their opinion about the election results. I still don't think I fully understand what in the world they were trying to do as far as a protest, but it got very violent. I think that they were probably dressed in these costumes for attention to prove their point about taking the country back. As far as what this means about voter fraud and voting rights, I don't think this is proven to be true at all. A lot of people realized that they need to go vote. Most of the stories and what I saw I probably got through NPR and the *New York Times*.

**Interviewer:** What content do you post online? What type of content do you try to make visible for others to see and what type of content do you try to hide from others seeing?

**Participant:** The only thing I post online are family related things for the most part or positive things like a positive quote or something funny, in relation to animals or something. I pretty much only have anything I posted visible to the people I have allowed to follow me. I don't really post anything that I try to hide from anyone.

**Interviewer:** Can you remember a time when you were careful about what you chose to "like" online because of how it might affect the visibility of other peoples' contributions and content in your social media feed, like on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

**Participant:** I don't think I can think of times when I like things. I mean, I like things because I like them and show support for someone or something they posted. But I don't really think about that. I only use Instagram. I don't really think that way when I'm liking or avoiding liking something.

**Interviewer:** Please tell me about a time when you tried to influence or change the content of what you see on YouTube, Google, or social media results by searching differently or when you are unsatisfied with internet search results, how do you adjust your searches to change the results?

**Participant:** The only thing that comes close to doing anything like that is skipping over the first few things that pop up in a search because they're usually an ad. For instance, and I don't know that this is true, but you might type in Burger King, but McDonald's is going to come up because they pay money to be a top hit for any fast-food search, but other than that I don't. I just skip over the first few that normally come up because they're usually not relevant to what I'm looking for.

**Interviewer:** How do you decide if an online source of information is reliable or credible?

**Participant:** There was a chart that came out, I think after the 2016 election that showed all the new sources, and it kind of showed if they were more Democratic or Republicans, who was neutral, and I discussed that with my family and they agreed with this chart, as far as news sources that are kind of neutral and present more facts. I've kind of stuck with following those specific news sources ever since that chart came out.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about a time when you double-checked information online to verify if it was credible? What made you suspicious? What steps did you take to see if the information was correct? And what did your findings make you feel about the website?

**Participant:** I think that a friend of mine posted something about Christine Northrup. And I can't remember exactly what it said, it just made me question it. Something very farfetched about menopause and basically, I checked her name on two trusted sources, and come to find out that I think PBS had invited her on 8 different times, but it made me question my friend who posted this before doing some fact-checking. It made me question them, but they have since removed all those videos so yes, they are back in my good graces.

**Interviewer:** Please tell me about a time that your friends or family distrusted a website or information on a website. Did they double-check the information from a different source to verify if it was credible?

**Participant:** With the coronavirus and the vaccines coming up all the time, about vaccines being safe. I think that I asked my daughter to look up information on the CDC to see what they were saying about it. I don't think I personally pulled it up for her to show her what the CDC was saying.

**Interviewer:** How do you think the media should cover stories about fake news or disinformation? Should the media do more to teach people how to verify the credibility of information?

**Participant:** I think that the media, which you know they do sometimes do this when they go into where this information came from and go to where the source of this information came from, I think it helps people to understand, you know where this perspective comes from. Yes, absolutely. I think the media should do more of that and teach people a better way to find where reliable sources are. Where you can look this information up to find that it's reliable.

**Interviewer:** The term "fake news" seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts about what it is? Where is it at? Who it targets? Who is vulnerable to it? What

it means for democracy? Is it a real problem? What are the politics of it all? What new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the internet age?

**Participant:** My thoughts about what fake news are: I think it's misinformation. It's taking things out of context. Where is it? Wow, I'd like to say it's on Fox News, but I mean, that's really what I care most about. and I'll hear people say that about CNN as well, more so about what I've seen on TV. Maybe that's why some people feel like they target people? They don't have any meaning for the people that are watching this news. For example, CNN may provide misleading information or whatever towards Trump negatively because that's what people watching CNN want to see. People watching Fox News support Trump, they provide more positive, not accurate, information about Trump. I think the people that are vulnerable to it are those that don't take the time to find out what's true and what's not and the uneducated. They just don't...I don't mean not educated and calling anyone stupid, but they just don't have the resources or know how to look up that information.

**Interviewer:** What do you think this means for democracy?

**Participant:** Well, I think this means for democracy, that it's made us very polarized. I do think that it is a real problem, absolutely.

**Interviewer:** What do you think the politics of this all is?

**Participant:** The politics of it all, I think it's the same as democracy. I just think it really polarizes us.

**Interviewer:** Please offer some examples of where you have seen fake news. Who are the people who publish it? What are they trying to get from it? What should be done about it?

**Participant:** I usually see fake news called out on comedy shows. It's usually about Fox News. They're commenting on it, so I guess Fox News is publishing it, but they're just trying to further support their viewers. I know there's a lot of controversy about cancel culture, but when it goes too far, where it is hurting people, I think that it should be stopped.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to share?

**Participant:** Just that this made me think about things. I didn't really think about these things, until we did this. So, it's something you start to think about and investigate more about what to do about the big news culture of all of this.

**Interviewer:** OK, what is today's date?

**Participant:** Today is October 27th, 2021.

**Interviewer:** Your state of residence?

**Participant:** West Virginia.

**Interviewer:** Your age?

**Participant:** 46

**Interviewer:** Your gender?

**Participant:** Female

**Interviewer:** Your race?

**Participant:** White

**Interviewer:** Your highest level of education completed.

**Participant:** Associates degree.

**Interviewer:** OK, thank you so much.